

University of Montana  
**ScholarWorks at University of Montana**

---

Syllabi

Course Syllabi

---

9-2013

# RLST 204H.01: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

Nathaniel B. Levtow

*University of Montana - Missoula*, [nathaniel.levtow@umontana.edu](mailto:nathaniel.levtow@umontana.edu)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

---

## Recommended Citation

Levtow, Nathaniel B., "RLST 204H.01: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible" (2013). *Syllabi*. 1778.  
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/1778>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Course Syllabi at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

Dr. Nathaniel Levtow  
Office: LA 156  
Office phone: 243-2845  
Email: nathaniel.levtow@umontana.edu

Office hours:  
Tu Th 9:30 – 11:00 am  
& by appointment

## **RLST 204H: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament**

University of Montana, Fall Semester 2013  
Tu Th 12:40 – 2:00 pm: LA106

### **Course Description**

This course offers an introduction to the modern study of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the history and religion of ancient Israel. It assumes no prior knowledge of the Bible, Judaism or Christianity. The goal of the course is to understand the development of the Hebrew Bible in its ancient contexts. We will approach the Bible from historical, comparative, literary, anthropological and archeological perspectives to illuminate the world of its authors.

### **Textbooks**

*The HarperCollins Study Bible* (NRSV translation) (HarperCollins, 2006)  
John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress, 2007) [IHB]  
V. H. Matthews and D. C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels* (Paulist, 2006) [OTP]

*E-reserve*: e-reserve documents may be accessed through the Mansfield Library Course Reserves website (<http://eres.lib.umat.edu/eres/>) using the course password “RLST204”

**Prerequisites**: None

### **Course Requirements**

- 1. Attendance**: Regular attendance is required for this course.
- 2. Readings**: Plan to complete all readings before the class on which they are assigned. Bring your Bible and any other assigned *ancient* readings to class with you. You do not need to bring your textbook (IHB) to class.
- 3. Three Quizzes**: will be given on **9/5**, **9/26**, and **11/07**. These quizzes are designed to test whether you have been reading the assignments and attending class. They will focus on the assigned texts and on information communicated in class lectures.
- 4. One essay**: on a topic to be handed out (together with specific guidelines on method and style), ca. 5-7 pages in length, will be due in class on **Tuesday December 3**.
- 5. Exams**:
  - i. A **midterm** exam will be given in class on **Tuesday October 22**.
  - ii. A **final** exam will be given on **Tuesday, December 10, 10:10 am – 12:10 pm**.

### **Grading:**

1. Attendance and class participation: 10%
2. Quizzes: 30%
3. Essay: 20%
4. Midterm exam: 20%
5. Final exam: 20%

### **Course Policies:**

- 1) There will be no make-up quizzes or exams unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Except in the case of a documented emergency, late papers will result in a decrease of one letter grade per day.
- 2) Students are allowed one cut, no penalties or questions asked. Each additional cut will reduce the attendance and participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of your final grade). Students who leave the classroom before the end of the class meeting will be counted as absent for the day. If you miss a class meeting, *it is then your responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during your absence.*
- 3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating the biblical text as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the Bible are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.
- 4) Plagiarism – the presentation of others' work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.



## Course Schedule

\*Note: Our schedule may change as our course develops; regular attendance will ensure that you are informed of any changes.

Tu 8/27

### **Introductions**

Th 8/29

### **Context and Method:**

Introducing the Bible and its modern study; ancient Israel and the ancient Near East

Readings:

IHB: Pages 1-14, 15-27

## **◆ In the Beginning: The Pentateuchal Narrative and Israel's Epic Past**

### **I. Creation and the Primeval History**

Our introduction to the Hebrew Bible begins with Genesis 1–11, also known as the “Primeval History.” As we explore these first chapters of the Bible, we will learn how to read biblical texts in a modern university setting. Topics for discussion include: approaches to the Bible; biblical authors and editors: the “Documentary Hypothesis”; the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern environment; myth and epic in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East.

Tu 9/3

### **Creation: Chaos and Order**

Texts: Genesis 1:1–2:4; Psalms 104:3–9; 74:12–19; 89:9–10; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9–10; Job 38:1–11; 40:15–41:34

OTP: Enuma Elish Stories; Stories of Baal and Anat

IHB: 28-35

Th 9/5 *\*Map Quiz\**

### **The Primeval History**

Texts: Genesis 2:4b–3:24 (Eden), 4–11 (from Adam to Abram)

OTP: Stories of Gilgamesh; Stories of Atrahasis

IHB: 36-43

## **II. Patriarchs and Matriarchs: The Sagas of Genesis**

Our reading of Genesis continues with the stories of Israel's founding families in Genesis 12–50. We will explore these famous stories with a view to their compositional history and structure, literary artistry, and historical contexts. Topics for discussion include: the “patriarchal age”; covenant, blessing, and promise; the art of biblical narrative; cult legends; sanctuaries and

sacrifice; “doublets”; The Yahwist, the Elohist, and the Priestly sources; Yahweh, the chief god of Israel; biblical heroes and heroines.

Tu 9/10

### **The Abraham/Isaac Cycle**

Texts: Genesis 12:1–25:18; 26 (focus on 12:1-9; 15:1–18:15; 18:16-19:38; 21:1–22:19)

IHB: 44-51

Th 9/12

### **The Jacob Cycle**

Texts: Genesis 25:19–34; 27–35; 38 (focus on 25:19–34; 27:1–28:22; 29:1–30; 29:31–30:24; 32:22-32; 34; 35; 38)

IHB: 51-52

Tu 9/17

### **Joseph and his Brothers**

Texts: Genesis 37 – 50

IHB: 52-54

Th 9/19

### **Genesis as a Whole**

Review and catch-up on Genesis and method.

IHB: Review 1-54

## **III. Israel in Egypt and Out**

Genesis concludes with the children of Jacob/Israel in Egypt; Exodus begins with the unusual origin-legend of a people in slavery. The stage is set for a return to Canaan, and the realization of the lost promises of Genesis. The deliverance from Egypt establishes the basis of mutual obligation (covenant) between Israel and Yahweh, a fundamental theme of Israelite history and religion that echoes throughout much of biblical literature. Topics for discussion include: Sea and Sinai; Moses and the Elohist; historicity of the Exodus narrative; biblical prose and poetry.

Tu 9/24

### **Moses and the Exodus**

Texts: Exodus 1-15:21 (focus on 1–4, 14–15); Psalm 114

OTP: Story of Sargon of Agade; Annals of Merneptah; El-Amarna Letters; Hymn to the Aten

IHB: 55-63

Th 9/26 *\*Quiz on Genesis, Exodus, method & context\**

## ◆ In the Beginning II: The History of Ancient Israel and Judah

The deliverance from Egypt leads directly to Sinai and its foundational covenant-giving event. We will return to this sojourn at Sinai *after* our study of the biblical story that runs from Joshua through 2 Kings.

\*For the following six class meetings read pages **94-152 in IHB**. But have a look at pages **84-93 in IHB** as well; this chapter (8) of the textbook is assigned for class on November 5 but it provides helpful background for these next six classes.

### I. The Emergence of Ancient Israel in Canaan

The books of Joshua and Judges bridge the gap between the pentateuchal narrative and the history of Israel in Canaan. We begin our reading of this second stage in biblical historiography with the account of Israel's emergence in Canaan. Topics for discussion include: history writing in ancient Israel; the Deuteronomistic History; Israel's obscure origins: debates on the emergence of Israel in Canaan; Israelites and Canaanites; heroes and heroines of the pre-monarchic period.

Tu 10/1

#### **Conquest and Settlement: The Book of Joshua**

Texts: Joshua 1-11; (skim 12:1-21:42); 22:1-24:32;  
Judges 1

IHB: 94-107

Th 10/3

#### **In those days there was no king... The Book of Judges**

Texts: Judges 2-21 (focus on 2; 4-5; 13-16; 17-18)

IHB: 108-115

### II. Kingdoms: The Biblical History of Israel and Judah

We will use four class sessions to read selections from the books of Samuel and Kings, which together tell the history of the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms from their beginnings to their ends. This ca. four hundred year history (10<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) is told from the perspective of the "deuteronomistic historians," who wrote toward the end of this epoch but who used a number of earlier historical sources to tell their particular tale. We will refer to moments in this history throughout the course. Our goal is to become acquainted with this historical work: the events it narrates, the sources it reveals, the ideas that guide its structure and development. Topics for discussion include: attitudes toward kingship in ancient Israel; the Deuteronomistic History: its sources and ideologies; narrative structure and development; archeology and inscriptions: extrabiblical evidence for ancient Israel and Judah; Solomon and the Jerusalem Temple; Zion theology and royal ideology.

Tu 10/8

**Samuel, Saul, and the Rise of David: Israelite Monarchy**

Texts: 1 Sam 1 –15 (Samuel and Saul: the transition to monarchy); 1 Sam 16 – 2 Sam 5:10 (Saul and the rise of David);  
Focus on: 1 Sam 1 + 2:11-4:1 (Samuel); 1 Sam 4:1b-7:1 [+ 2 Sam 6] (Ark Narrative); 8-10 (Samuel and Saul); 12 (deuteronomistic editing); 15:10-18:16, 28:3-19 (rejection of Saul and acceptance of David; David and Goliath); 31 (deaths of Saul and Jonathan); 2 Sam 1-5:10 (David becomes king); Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (on kingship)  
Skim: 1 Sam 18:17-28:2 (Saul versus David).

IHB: 116-122

Th 10/10

**David and Solomon: From Kingdom to Empire**

Texts: 2 Sam 5:11 – 1 Kings 2 (from David to Solomon);  
1 Kings 3 – 11 (the reign of Solomon)  
Focus on: 2 Sam 7 (Nathan's oracle); 11:1-12:24 (David and Bathsheba); 24:1-24 (census plague, site for Jerusalem Temple); 1 Kings 1-2 (death of David, succession of Solomon); 3 + 4:20-34 (wisdom, fame, and peace of Solomon); 1 Kings 8:1-9:9 (Solomon's [deuteronomistic] temple prayer);  
Skim: 2 Sam 13-19 (Absalom, Absalom!); 1 Kings 5-7 (Solomon and the Jerusalem Temple); 1 Kings 9:10-11:43 (further exploits and death of Solomon)

OTP: Tel Dan Annals

IHB: 123-136

Tu 10/15

**Two Nations under God: The Divided Kingdoms and the Exile of Israel**

Texts: 1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17  
Focus on: 1 Kings 12-16; 2 Kings 11-17  
Skim: 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 10 (Elijah-Elisha cycle), we will return to this later.

OTP: Annals of Mesha

IHB: 137-140; 141-146 (skim); 146-148

Th 10/17

**Judah alone: The Reforming Kings and the Destruction of Jerusalem**

Texts: 2 Kings 18 – 25  
Lamentations 1, 4

OTP: Annals of Sennacherib; Lachish letters; Lamentation for Ur

IHB: 148-152

**Tu 10/22      \*Midterm Exam\***

## ◆ Sinai and Jerusalem: Israelite Religion and Society

We now return to Sinai and the Pentateuch, where we find the authoritative social and religious legislation of ancient Israel (and later, of Judaism). Our goal is to become acquainted with the literary structures and social concerns that organize and drive this important complex of legal traditions (Exodus 19:1–Deuteronomy). Topics for discussion include: laws and treaties in the ancient Near East; the Ten Commandments; Israelite society: family, clan, tribe, nation; the status of women in Israelite society; the priestly codes; temples and priesthoods; sacrifice; purity and holiness; festivals and the festival calendar; the Sabbath; Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic movement.

### I. Law and Covenant

Th 10/24

#### **Law, Treaty, and Covenant in Exodus and Deuteronomy**

Texts: Exodus 19-24, 32-34  
Deuteronomy 4:44–5:33; 27–28;  
OTP: Code of Hammurabi  
IHB: 64-73

### II. Leviticus, Priesthoods, Festivals, and Temple

Tu 10/29

#### **Leviticus: Priesthoods and Holiness**

Texts: Leviticus 1–7 (offerings and sacrifices), 11–15 (purity, clean and unclean), 16 (day of atonement);  
Leviticus 17–22 (moral and ritual holiness), 25 (sabbatical year), 26 (rewards and punishments)  
IHB: 74-81

Th 10/31

#### **Temples, Festivals, and the Sabbath**

Texts: Pilgrimages and festival calendars: Exodus 23:14–19; 34:18, 22–23;  
Deuteronomy 16:1–17; Leviticus 23:1–44; Numbers 28–29;  
The Sabbath: Exodus 23:12; 34:21; 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15;  
Leviticus 23:3; Amos 8:5; Hosea 2:11  
Review: 2 Sam 7:1–17; 24:18–24 (David and the Temple);  
1 Kings 5–9 (Solomon and the Temple), cf. 1 Chronicles 21:18–22:1; 2  
Chronicles 3:1; 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1 [+ 2 Sam 6] (Ark Narrative); Psalm 48;  
Skim: Exodus 25-31, 35-40 (desert sanctuary)  
IHB: 81-83



### III. The Torah of Moses: Deuteronomy, Religion, and Politics

Tu 11/5

#### **Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic Movement**

Texts: Deuteronomy 4–11; 12–26 (focus on: Deuteronomy 4:1–41; 6; 12; 13; 16:21; 18:9–14; 26:5–9; 30:1–20 [cult centralization, apostasy and “idolatry”, historical creeds, pre- and postexilic Deuteronomists]);  
2 Kings 17:7–23  
2 Kings 22:3–23:27

IHB: 84-93

Th 11/7      *\*Quiz on Sinai, Law, and Temple \**

#### **◆ Prophets and Prophecy**

Our study of Israelite history and religion has prepared us well to explore the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, which offer voluminous and unique insights into Israelite religion, history, society, and literature. Topics for discussion include: the role of prophecy in Israel and the ancient Near East; the prophetic canon; prophetic schools and traditions; the prophetic call; symbolic acts; the prophets as a source for Israelite religion, culture, and history; Hebrew poetry; art and iconography in ancient Israel.

Tu 11/12

#### **Introduction: Prophecy in Ancient Israel**

Texts: Review Elijah-Elisha cycle (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 10) and focus on: 1 Kings 22:1-40; 2 Kings 1–2, 4–10

Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1:4–10 (prophetic calls)  
Isaiah 20; Ezekiel 4, 5 (symbolic acts)  
Jeremiah 23:9–22 (“false prophets”)

OTP: Mari Letters

IHB: 141-146

Th 11/14

#### **Israel in the Shadow of Assyria: The Eighth Century Prophets**

(For historical background see 2 Kings 14:23–20:19; note that Isaiah 36–39 = 2 Kings 18:13–20:19)

Texts: Isaiah 1, 6–11;  
Amos, 1–5, 7, 9:11–15;  
Hosea 1–4, 6, 11;  
Micah 1, 3, 4

IHB: 153-163, 164-173

Tu 11/19

**Judah in the Shadow of Babylon: The Book of Jeremiah**

(For historical background see 2 Kings 22–25; note that Jeremiah 52 = 2 Kings 24:18 = 25:30)

- Texts: Jeremiah:
- (a) biographical materials: 1:1–3; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 19:1–20:6; 20:7–12, 14–18; 36–45;
  - (b) deuteronomistic prose narrative: 7:1–8:3; 11:1–5, 9–14; 18:1–12; 21:1–10;
  - (c) oracles against Judah: 2:2–6:30; 8:4–9:11; 9:17–22; 10:1–10; 12:7–13;
  - (d) letter to the exiles: 29:1–14;
  - (e) oracles of hope (new covenant): 31:23–40

IHB: 174-184

Th 11/21

**By the Rivers of Babylon: The Prophets of Exile**

- Texts: “Second Isaiah”:
- Isa 40:1–11 (call)
  - Isa 40: 18–20, 25–26; 42:17; 44:9–20; 45:1–7, 16, 20–21; 46:5–11 (polemics against other gods and their images)
  - Isa 43:14–21 (transformation of the exodus motif)
  - Isa 41:8–16; 42:1–4; 44:1–5; 45:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12 (Yahweh’s servant)
- Ezekiel:
- Ezek 1:1–3:15, 8–10
  - Ezek 3–4; 5:1–17 (symbolic acts)
  - Ezek 18 (individual responsibility)
  - Ezek 20; 11:14–21; 36:22–32; 37:1–14, 15–28 (the future)

IHB: 185-196, 197-208

Tu 11/26, Th 11/28    *\*No classes (academic conference; Thanksgiving)*

## ◆ The Writings: Sayings and Songs

Tu 12/3    *\*Papers due in class\**

### **Wisdom Literature**

Texts:     Proverbs: skim 1–10, 17–24; focus on 1, 8, 10  
              Ecclesiastes 1–5, 12:9–13  
              Job 1–7, 38–42

IHB:        248-255, 256-267

### **Songs of Israel**

Texts:     Song of Songs (= Song of Solomon) 1, 7–8

IHB:        236-247

## ◆ The Legacy of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible as we know it reached its final stages of development in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Through their creative reinterpretations of biblical traditions, ancient Jewish and early Christian communities ensured that the Hebrew Bible remained relevant and vital to future generations, and to the new cultural and historical movements that sprung from its legacy. Our course ends with a look at the future life of the Hebrew Bible, from the closing of the canon to the birth of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. Topics for discussion include: the formation of the biblical text; the Dead Sea Scrolls; biblical traditions and their later interpretations; the Hebrew Bible, Judaism, and Christianity.

Th 12/5

### **The Book of Books**

Texts:     Dead Sea Scrolls (e-reserve)

IHB:        302-306; see also 278-292, 293-301

Final Exam: **Tuesday, December 10, 10:10 am – 12:10 pm**